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The reason I decided to write a song: This was really because I thought this medium would be easiest for me for this kind of project. I have done this concept of rewriting the lyrics to songs for classes before,[[1]](#footnote-1) and they have generally worked out well. I have always been passionate about music and writing, and especially when they’re combined, they just feel more natural to me than, say, making a diorama would. I also thought that a project that was performance-based would reflect Lily’s role in *House of Mirth*, and how she feels that she must always perform in certain ways to get what she wants, especially with men.

The reason I decided to write a song, based on the melody of a popular Cee Lo Green song: The novelty of pop music was to me a good parallel to the context of the medium through which *House of Mirth* was initially published. The entertaining, occasionally bubblegum quality of magazines focused on fashion and celebrity is in the same vein as the medium of Top 40 radio, and the hedonistic nature of both is the essence of the world of luxury, gambling, infidelity, scandal, and glamour of the naughty rich people of *House of Mirth*. This is not the only way in which these two forums intersect. The lives of celebrities in our world and of the elite of the *House of Mirth* are both constantly watched and envied. Before I presented my song, I mocked the original lyric “if I was richer, I’d still be with ya,” because of who it is coming from. Having a net worth of $22 million, Cee Lo Green isn’t exactly poor (Said). Likewise, most of the characters in House of Mirth are pretty well-off. They are the well-to-do social climbers that would not be out of place grazing the pages of tabloid magazines today. Because of the pedestal they are placed on in high society, much like celebrities, they are more susceptible to scrutiny and having their actions being misconstrued to create scandal and headlines. Even Bertha Dorset and Rosedale, who are at times the Regina Georges of this world, become subject to this, and Lily Bart experiences more than her fair share of gossip, especially at the hands of these two.

The reason I kept the lyrics that I did: The lyrics I decided not to change – mostly “ain’t that some shit” and “why” – I chose specifically because they reflect my own emotions and frustration with Lily’s choices more than anything. While the woman of “Fuck You” and Lily Bart both have finances in mind when it comes to relationships, their actions toward love are very different, and I sought to depict this difference as well as I could over the course of a four minute song. I wanted to pay homage to the song, but considering that the song is written from the male’s perspective about the woman, I thought it would be best to take a different approach that painted Lily Bart in a *slightly* more empathetic position. In *House of Mirth,* we understand that her mother, gender, and social standing all had a considerable role in what became her aversion to all things “dingy,” cultivating her like “a rare flower grown for exhibition,” incapable of an “independent existence” (278, 270). As a woman, Lily Bart receives “all the disadvantages” of social situations, and are not afforded the luxury of justifying their actions, but rather only of contributing “the story that’s easiest to believe” (178, 197). Besides this, Lily Bart is not wholly a gold digger, and does have tender moments with Lawrence Selden that are not always motivated by her financial aspirations.

Although broadly speaking, the generalization of the superficiality of pop culture may ring true, depth can be found in surprising places, and this is something that rings true for Lily Bart as well. Though her desires may be considered shallow, they are practical goals for Lily Bart, and her monetary goals have pragmatic reasons behind her desire to acquire them. Lily understands herself to be a “very useless person,” and to her, having a rich husband is the most simplistic way to set her future despite this (270). And besides, as a woman, Lily Bart is often presented to be an item to be acquired as well. She is always seen as an object to be admired, and her beauty – and therefore her worth -- is often likened to works of art and flowers – or even a creature to be dissected (278, 239). Her value as a person is linked to her beauty, and this in turn is understood in terms of monetary value. After her performance as a living embodiment of art in her tableaux vivante, Rosedale compliments her by saying that were she herself a painting he could easily earn twice her cost in ten years (139). The role of art and performance is so important in music, and Lily Bart understands how she is expected to perform. Above all, this is what I aspired to have people take away from my project: Lily Bart is doing the best she can to rise against the only lifestyle she has ever really known, and as justifiable as her internal struggle may be, I, as the consumer, feel just as entitled to my right to criticize her for this as I do the Kardashians. Maybe I am not any better than the characters of *House of Mirth* after all.

Works Cited

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Said, Sammy. "Cee Lo Green Net Worth." *The Richest*. N.p., n.d. Web. 8 Dec. 2013. <http://www.therichest.com/celebnetworth/celeb/singer/cee-lo-green-net-worth/>.

Wharton, Edith. *The House of Mirth*. Ware, Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1997. Print.

1. Fun fact: I once wrote an entire song about photosynthesis for a high school biology class, as well as a “We Didn’t Start the Fire”-esque song of events that occurred since the year I was born, all to the tune of songs by the band The Cab. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)